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H.B. 5531 AN ACT CONCERNING THE CARE AND TREATMENT OF PERSONS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS OR SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER.

This testimony is being submitted in opposition to H.B. 5531. I am a person that has been diagnosed with a mental illness, and I also work in the behavioral health field as a Recovery Support Specialist. However, I am graduating this semester with my MSW, which will allow me to become a more active member of the treatment team.

I have concerns about this bill for a variety of reasons. The first concern I have is that mandated treatment is a violation of civil rights law. I consider mandated treatment to be no different than forced institutionalization or warehousing. It feels like we are moving back to the days of institutionalization, only we are calling it community based care.

A second concern that I have with this bill is with the fact that mandated treatment is costly, and difficult to enforce. How is this really going to work? Imagine how traumatizing this is going to be for families who are trying to do the best that they can to keep their loved one under control. I don't think that anyone realizes that this legislation is making it okay for people to come into your home, hold you down, and forcibly medicate your loved one. This is a horrible idea.

The final issue that I have with HB 5531 is with the reality that the choices of medications available (especially anti-psychotics) are ineffective and have atrocious side effects. They are merely chemical restraints used to sedate a person to the point that they don't cause problems. They don't actually, in the majority of cases, stop symptoms. Ask the majority of people who have lived experience. I believe strongly that mandated treatment is nothing more than a form of social control and this legislation is only going to give more power to people who don't actually understand what it's like to recover.

I know from personal experience and from the work I engage in with others that true recovery occurs when an individual is empowered to make choices about what works in their own lives. True recovery is the opposite of coercion. It occurs with proper supports, empowerment and opportunities to engage in meaningful activities.